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NATIONAL EUGENICS IN RELATION TO IMMIGRATION.*

BY ROBERT DE C. WARD.

“THE study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally”—that is the definition of National Eugenics. To put it bluntly, eugenics has to do with breeding human beings for the betterment of the human race.

The word eugenics has become familiar within the last ten or a dozen years, chiefly through the writings of Sir Francis Galton, and of Professor Karl Pearson of the University of London. The thing itself, however, is not new, for there have been various efforts to improve the breeds of men from early times. The exposure of weakling children in the old days; the segregation of criminals and insane; suggestions looking towards regulating the marriage of those afflicted with hereditary diseases—these are all familiar indications of eugenic ideas. The Indiana law, which makes it impossible for habitual criminals and others to reproduce their kind, and the few State laws which require medical certificates before licenses to marry are issued, are good eugenic measures *if properly administered*, but it is clear that public opinion must be educated to a much higher degree before legislation will go far along any of these lines. Eugenics is both negative and positive. It includes the prevention of the unfit as well as the conscious attempt to produce the more fit. Darwin and his followers laid the foundations of the science of eugenics. They have shown us the methods and the possibilities of the pro-

* In this paper the writer has drawn freely upon the recent publications of the Francis Galton Laboratory for National Eugenics of the University of London and upon those of The Eugenics Education Society of London. The admirable work now being done in England along the lines of National Eugenics deserves far more attention than it has yet received in the United States.

duction of new species of plants and animals. They have indicated the lines along which the eugenic idea of selection for parenthood must run. We have been applying this knowledge practically in improving our breeds of sheep and cattle, developing our race-horses, creating new and better kinds of grains and fruits. In fact, artificial selection has been applied to almost every living thing with which man has close relations except man himself. Why, we now ask, should the breeding of man, the most important animal of all, alone be left to chance?

We in the United States have a very special interest in national eugenics, for we are here forming a new race of an extraordinarily heterogeneous character, and we have a remarkably favorable opportunity for practising eugenic principles in the selection of the fathers and mothers of future American children through our power to regulate alien immigration. The United States, rather than England, should be the centre of eugenic propaganda. Yet so far our people are practically silent on this question. Most of the discussions of the immigration problem in the past have been concerned with its economic side. The question is, however, a racial, perhaps even more than an economic one. The days of a dominant Anglo-Saxon immigration are over, forever. From a little trickling rivulet, forty years ago, when it furnished less than one per cent. of our alien arrivals, southern and eastern European immigration has increased until it now numbers about seventy per cent. of the total. It has become a flood, and the flood is increasing. Asia is contributing more each year, and British India has begun to send its advance guard. Already we have not hundreds of thousands, but millions of Italians and Slavs and Jews whose blood is going into the new American race. There are those who believe that the Anglo-Saxon American will disappear as the American Indian and the American buffalo have disappeared, and they have some basis for their belief.

What kind of a race will this new one be, made up of such diverse elements that, as Professor William Z. Ripley says, "the most complex populations of Europe seem ethnically pure by contrast"? Truly, this is a "melting-pot" for all the nations and peoples of the world. Into it we have allowed Europe, and even Asia and Africa, to throw every sort of material, while we ourselves have been blissfully—shall we not rather say criminally?—

careless as to what the final product is to be. Will the new American type be a superior or an inferior one? Who can say? Evidence is available on both sides of the question, and opposite views upon it are held by those authorities who have studied it. In the midst of disagreement among the scholars, what shall the layman do? One thing is clear: the results of biological study go to show that the crossing of types should not be carried too far, or be too extreme. In the light of the evidence which is available, it seems to the writer that the burden of proof is distinctly upon those who hold that the new American race will be a better, stronger, more intelligent race, and not a weak and possibly degenerate mongrel. The recent report of the Immigration Commission on the assimilation of immigrants shows that in New York "the American-born children of the long-headed Sicilians and those of the round-headed east European Hebrews have very nearly the same intermediate head form." In other words, there seems to be evidence of the production of a new type in this country. This is interesting, but we can hardly agree with "The Survey" in thinking that this "discovery is of profound significance and forms quite a new element in the discussion of assimilation of immigrants." From a eugenic standpoint the long-headedness or the short-headedness is not vital. The vital question is this: Is the new type physically and mentally better than the old? For the sake of argument, let us admit that a mixture of race stocks, such as is going on in this country, is desirable. Is it not apparent that the individuals who are to be the progenitors of the mixed stock should at least be as good, mentally and physically, as the average of those already here if there is not to be a gradual degeneration of our people? In other words, is not careful selection of our immigrants of extreme importance?

A question which naturally arises at this point is this: Does the older, or "native," stock tend to keep its original dominant position by a high birth-rate? President Eliot did much to set people thinking on this question when he showed, in his annual report for 1901 and 1902, that of the graduates of seven Harvard classes in the 1870's twenty-eight per cent. are unmarried, and those who are married average only two surviving children. Since then other investigations along similar lines have shown that the native population is failing to hold its own; it is dying out because of its low birth-rate. Two children will not keep a

family from dying out, nor will three. Statistics have shown that in the average four children are necessary if the family is to continue. Of the four, two either die before they are married or never marry, or, if they do marry, have no children. The remaining two are thus left to hand on the family name. Among the families of our newest immigrants, on the other hand, children are born with reckless regularity. It is true that the birth-rates of many of our older immigrants are falling somewhat, as is the case with the Germans and the Irish, and as seems to be happening with other more recent immigrants who are congested in the cities. But even if the second and later generations of immigrants do show a falling birth-rate, the influx of new aliens continues, and the Anglo-Saxon portion of the race is therefore becoming more and more submerged. The question before us is a race question. It is a question of what kind of babies shall be born.

This falling birth-rate in the United States is no peculiarity of our own people. A low and falling birth-rate is a world-wide phenomenon. In Great Britain, for example, the birth-rate fell from thirty-six per thousand in 1876 to twenty-seven per thousand in 1907. But the most serious thing is that the fall is not the same in all classes. If the lowest stratum of society in England had been affected equally with the higher the twenty-seven per thousand would have been still further reduced. Society is recruiting itself from below. The eugenically less valuable portion of the community is furnishing a disproportionately large share of the next generation. A selective birth-rate has been established which is tending towards a degeneration of the stock. But clearly, if the race is to progress, the fitter part of the population should be the most fertile. Small wonder that the eugenists cry out: "The choice for Western civilization will ere long be the final one between eugenics or extinction. . . ." Advancing civilization has brought about a more and more artificial death-rate by prolonging the life of thousands of unfit persons who in old days would have died without reproducing their kind. To-day many of these not only live, but marry and have children. It has, therefore, become of the highest importance to have a selective birth-rate, selective according to eugenic standards, if the race is to progress.

It has been one of the common arguments in favor of an arti-

ficially restricted birth-rate that the chances of the children are better if the number of these children be small; that these children, one or two in number, will not only have better educational and social opportunities, but that they will be physically and mentally better equipped. Quality, not quantity, is the cry. What are the facts of eugenics? They are these: that the first-born members of a family are more liable to insanity, to tuberculosis, to criminality, to mental defects; they are more nervous and have less stable constitutions. Therefore, if we reduce the size of our families we tend to decrease the relative proportion of the mentally and physically sound in our community; we are working against the teachings of eugenics; we are bringing into the world the weaker, not the stronger.

What is the relation between this aspect of eugenics and immigration to the United States? Is it not plain? A falling birth-rate in countries where the population is homogeneous is far less serious than in our own. In the United States the low and falling birth-rate is principally confined to the Anglo-Saxon element, and the tendency to multiply more rapidly is found among the less intelligent, the most recent immigrants. This clearly operates to bring about a tremendously rapid change in the race.

Most of us have met these questions of our falling birth-rate, and of the production of a new race in our country, with the doctrine of the "survival of the fittest." We have said: "After all, it is a question of the 'survival of the fittest,' and if we are not the fittest we must, of course, go under." This whole belief is based upon an erroneous conception of the meaning of the "survival of the fittest." What Spencer and what Darwin really meant was the survival not of the "best," but of those most fitted to survive. These are not necessarily most fitted for any other purpose than mere survival. As Dr. C. W. Saleeby has clearly expressed it:

"A thing that is fit is a thing that 'fits.' A living creature survives in proportion as it fits its environment. . . . The kind of microbe that best fits into the environment provided by, say, human blood is the fittest and will survive, and be the cause of our commonest disease. Thus the tubercle bacillus is at once the 'fittest' microbe, and not the best, but the worst. In a society of blackguardism the biggest blackguard is the fittest man and will survive; he is also the worst. . . . The capacity to fit into an environment is the capacity that determines

survival; it has no moral connotation whatever. . . . The eugenic ideal, the ideal of race culture, is to insure that the fittest shall be the best."

Professor Pearson has pointed out that the "survival of the fittest" practically means the survival of the most fertile. It is a marked characteristic of modern city life, as Heron has shown, that those least fitted, mentally and morally, survive. The "survival of the fittest," therefore, often means racial degeneration.

We have been relying almost altogether upon environment, educational, religious, social, to bring about the assimilation and the racial improvement of all these millions of aliens in our country. We have felt that our public schools, our parks, our playgrounds, our settlement work—all these will solve the problem of assimilation; will amalgamate these heterogeneous elements into one consistent whole; will make the new American race a better one than any the world has ever seen. Just here, again, we strike a very important point of contact between our immigration problem and the teachings of eugenics. It is true that there is as yet comparatively little evidence available, but so far as it goes it shows that it is far more advantageous to improve the condition of the race through parentage than through change of environment. Education, environment, hygiene, can modify and develop; they cannot create. The philanthropist looks to these means to preserve the race. "It is the easy path," the eugenists tell us, "but it cannot achieve the desired result. . . . There is no hope of racial purification in any environment which does not mean selection of the germ." We cannot, *a priori*, assume that nurture has more weight than nature. To use an illustration given by Professor Pearson, finding a "fitter" child, mentally and physically, in a cleaner and less crowded home suggests at once that it is the home which made the fitness. Yet it may have been that the mentally and physically fit parents, who made such a home possible, are the real reason for the fitness of the child. Finding a weakling child, whose father is a sweat-shop tailor, we say: "The father's unhealthy occupation is responsible for the weakling child." Yet the father was probably physically so degenerate that he could not follow any occupation except that of a tailor, and the poor physique of his offspring undoubtedly resulted from his own poor physique. It is a general rule that weaklings resort to the less desirable occupations; hence it follows that the offspring of parents in such occupations are likely

to be weaklings also. We must beware of letting our natural prejudices distort our judgment in such matters.

We speak of education as if that alone could eradicate most, even all, of the evils which result from heredity. We point with satisfaction to the brilliant work done in our public schools by the foreign-born children, who six months ago knew no English and now stand at the head of their classes, and devour Shakspere, Scott and Macaulay until far into the night. But is it not clear that education can educate only what heredity gives? Havelock Ellis has said: "It matters comparatively little what sort of education we give children; the primary matter is what sort of children we have got to educate." And Pearson has emphatically stated that "no scheme of wider or more thorough education will bring up, in the scale of intelligence, hereditary weakness to the level of hereditary strength."

Are we arguing against education or against improving the environment? By no means. But we are trying to point out that we are pinning our faith in a general racial improvement upon the less effective method. An inheritance of acquired characters is not demonstrable. Environment does modify the bodily characters of the present generation—we all know that—but it does not modify the germ plasms from which the next generation is produced. . . . It may give the good germ plasm a better chance, but it does not kill off the bad germ plasm. . . . At most, environment can provide a selection of which germ plasms among the many present shall be potential and which shall remain latent. It is largely because environment is so obvious, and because its modification is comparatively easy, that we seek in that the improvement of the race. But breeders of race-horses do not expect to produce winners by improving their stables, or by changing the quality of the oats, or by training or exercising poor, non-racing stock. They select the stock. It is race, not environment, which is with them the fundamental consideration. Biology has taught us that far more can be done in a few generations by selecting the stock than can be accomplished in ages by trying to modify the stock through environment.

It is, however, unprofitable to discuss heredity and environment as if these two factors were necessarily opposed to one another, or to try to determine the relative value of each in such a very general view of the subject as our present one. We are

simply trying to indicate the difficulties in the situation, and to call attention to the fact that heredity and not environment alone, and heredity far more than environment, must be taken into account in all efforts towards racial improvement. Environment in relation to heredity may sometimes be likened to the trigger, which makes the gun go off. The cartridge is there, good or bad, already. Environment may tend to develop tendencies which are harmful to the community, or those which are beneficial. It is our business to see to it that we create such an environment that, if possible, only the good tendencies shall develop. We are to-day penalizing fit parentage by making it possible, even easy, for unfit parents to obtain provision, in asylums and hospitals and institutions of all kinds, for any number of diseased and degenerate children whom they please to bring into the world. Fit parents, who are responsible, steady workers, supporting their own children, are at a disadvantage.

We have noted some of the main points of contact between our problem of alien immigration and the science of national eugenics. How far do our present immigration laws enable us to keep out those who are physically, mentally and morally undesirable for parenthood; whose coming here will tend to produce an inferior rather than a superior American race; who are eugenically unfit for race culture? We in the United States have an opportunity which is unique in history for the practice of eugenic principles. Our country was founded and developed by picked men and women. And to-day, by selecting our immigrants through proper immigration legislation, we have the power to pick out the best specimens of each race to be the parents of our future citizens. But we have left the choice almost altogether to the selfish interests which do not care whether we want the immigrants they bring, or whether the immigrants will be the better for coming. Steamship agents and brokers all over Europe and western Asia are to-day deciding for us the character of the American race of the future.

It is no argument against practising eugenic ideas in the selection of our alien immigrants to say that our New England country towns are full of hopelessly degenerate native Americans who are inferior, mentally, morally and physically, to the "sturdy peasants of Europe." It will not help to reduce the number of our native degenerates if we admit alien degenerates. National

eugenics means the prevention of the breeding of the unfit native, no less than the prevention of the admission, and of the breeding after admission, of the unfit alien.

Should we not exercise the same care in admitting human beings as we exercise in relation to animals or insect pests or disease germs? Yet it is true that we have actually been taking more care in the selection, and in the examination for soundness and for health, of a Hereford bull or a Southdown ewe, imported for the improvement of our cattle and sheep, than we have taken in the selection of the alien men and women who are coming here to be the fathers and mothers of future American children. We do not hesitate to prohibit the importation of cattle from a foreign country where the foot and mouth disease is prevalent. It is only in very extreme cases that we have ever taken such a step in the case of the importation of aliens, yet there are certain parts of Europe from which it would be better for the American race if no aliens at all were admitted. Our present laws are intended to exclude some twenty or more classes of mentally, physically, morally and economically undesirable aliens. The list is formidable and seems abundantly sufficient to accomplish adequate eugenic selection. But careful and unprejudiced students of immigration agree that these laws do not keep out the unfit so as to preserve the *status quo*, and certainly do not promote eugenic improvement. We already have an army of not less than 150,000 feeble-minded in the United States, of whom only a very small percentage are in institutions, the rest being free to propagate their kind. And of those in institutions the large proportion are there only temporarily, being at liberty for much of the time during their reproductive period. Further, there are over 150,000 insane in the institutions of this country, and of these many have already left offspring to perpetuate their insanity. In spite of these appalling facts, appalling from the standpoint of mere sentiment and of mere philanthropy, doubly appalling from the standpoint of eugenics, we have been admitting alien insane, and alien imbeciles, and alien epileptics, and alien habitual criminals, partly because of a lax enforcement of the law under past administrations, partly because the law is incapable, under existing conditions, of effective enforcement. Parenthood on the part of the insane, the imbecile, the feeble-minded, the hereditary criminal, and those afflicted with hereditary disease, is a crime against

the future. To admit such persons into this country is no less a crime against the future.

The ideal selection of our immigrants, from the eugenic point of view, would be possible only if we could have a fairly complete family history, running back a few generations, showing the hereditary tendencies of each alien. The results of eugenic investigation already reached have given us enough definite knowledge to enable us to exclude, if we had these pedigrees, the larger number of aliens who would themselves be undesirable, or would have defective or delinquent offspring. This ideal selection is obviously impossible to carry out.

The next best plan, which has the advantage of being feasible, although it would require legislation and considerable expenditure of public money (yet would not almost any expenditure, even on a huge scale, be a wise national policy in so important a matter?) would be to insist that each alien, on landing here, should undergo a very thorough mental and physical examination at the hands of our Public Health and Marine Hospital Service surgeons. These examinations would involve a stripping to the skin of each alien; the usual physical and mental examination; tests for syphilis and similar precautions. Is this too much to demand when the welfare of a whole new race is concerned? The eugenist is ready with his answer; he says, emphatically, No. We certainly ought to begin at once to segregate, far more than we now do, all our native and foreign-born population which is unfit for parenthood. They must be prevented from breeding. But the biggest, the most effective, the most immediate way in which we can further national eugenics is at the ports where this year over half a million alien immigrants will land. Our immigration officials are doing all in their power, under existing conditions, to select our immigrants. Our surgeons are doing a wonderful work, under tremendous disadvantages, in trying to detect the physical and mental disabilities which by law debar the aliens who have them. But it is nothing short of a crime to admit people, as often happens in a rush season, at the rate of 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 in one day. On April 11th last, according to press reports, 7,931 aliens were landed at Ellis Island. We ought to limit the number of aliens who shall be landed in one day to a certain maximum which could reasonably well be carefully examined. We have a perfect right to do that, just as we have a perfect right to prohibit

immigration entirely. The steamship companies, the foreign societies, and others interested in one way or another in foreign immigration, would vigorously object. But those who are seriously and unselfishly concerned for the future of this race would welcome such a move. We ought to increase the number of the surgeons detailed for the most important duty of inspecting arriving aliens. We might have to enlarge the accommodations at our immigration stations. But can there be anything more vital than this if we are to do our duty to the unborn Americans of future generations?

We can go a long way towards accomplishing our object if we increase the fines which the steamship companies now pay when they bring over an alien who is found, on our own examination here, to be an idiot, imbecile, epileptic, or suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease which could have been detected at the port of departure. The fine is now only one hundred dollars. The steamship companies pay little attention to the provision. They run their chances of having such aliens detected on landing, and in some cases have been known to insure themselves against possible loss by obliging the alien to deposit one hundred dollars when he buys his ticket. If we increased this fine to, say, one thousand dollars, the steamship companies would themselves, without expense to us, make a much more thorough examination abroad before sailing, and if we made our own medical examinations here less hurriedly and more carefully we should soon accomplish much of the desired result.

In addition to the steps which we should take at once to accomplish the more effective exclusion of the insane, imbecile, idiot, tuberculous, those afflicted with loathsome or dangerous contagious diseases, etc., we ought to amend our immigration laws so that it will be possible to exclude more aliens of such low vitality and poor physique that they are eugenically undesirable for parenthood. The law of 1907 excludes persons "who are found to be and are certified by the examining surgeon as being mentally or physically defective, such mental or physical defect being of a nature which may affect the ability of such alien to earn a living." This clause has been found to be rather ineffective, partly because it was for a time taken to be an economic rather than a physical test, and partly because of other provisions in the Act which largely nullify this section. From a eugenic

standpoint good physique is of fundamental importance. It is a great satisfaction to see that in his last annual report the Commissioner-General of Immigration suggests consideration of the possible exclusion of male aliens who do not come up to the physical standard set by the recruiting service of the United States army. Congressman Elvins, of Missouri, has introduced into the House of Representatives a bill (H. R. 21584) in which he proposes to amend our immigration laws in that direction. This is an excellent eugenic measure.

To go further with the intricacies of legislation is impossible within the limits of this paper. Inadequate laws, difficulties of proper enforcement, unsympathetic and in some cases hostile officials, the steady opposition of foreign steamship companies, of foreign societies in our midst and of foreign newspapers published in the United States—these are a few among the many factors which have brought about the unfortunate condition in which we have found ourselves in regard to the proper selection of our alien immigrants. It is a great satisfaction to know that under the present Secretary of Commerce and Labor, Hon. Charles Nagel, and under Hon. William Williams, Commissioner of Immigration at the Port of New York, the principal landing-place of the vast majority of our immigrants, the administration of our immigration laws has been brought to a very high standard of efficiency. There has never been a time, in the history of our immigration service, when the law has been enforced so justly, so humanely, so impartially.

Let us see to it that the breeding of the human race in this country receives the attention which it so surely deserves. Let us see to it that our immigration laws are always properly enforced, and are amended along lines which shall give us the best stock which other countries can send us. Let us see to it that we are protected, not merely from the burden of supporting alien dependents, delinquents and defectives, but from what George William Curtis called that “watering of the nation’s life-blood” which results from their breeding after admission.

Professor Karl Pearson has well said: “You cannot change the leopard’s spots, and you cannot change bad stock to good; you may dilute it, possibly spread it over a wide area, spoiling good stock, but until it ceases to multiply it will not cease to be.”

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